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UNCLAS LAGOS 000175

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS OES/S
USDA PASS FAS/ITP
USDA PASS APHIS
USDA PASS ICD
USDA PASS FAS/FAA FOR RANDY HAGER
USDA FOR CMP
USDA PASS OA
EMBASSY ROME PASS US MISSION FOR UN, UNMI ROME

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: WIDESPREAD BIRD DEATHS SPARK AVIAN FLU WORRIES

REF: ABUJA 289

1. (SBU) Ag Attache spoke with the Agriculture Ministry's Chief Vet Officer (CVO), who reported widespread poultry deaths in mid-January at a farm in Kaduna State owned by the Nigerian Minister of Sports. The farm lost its entire flock of 46,000 chickens. Samples from this farm were sent to the National Vet Research Institute (NVRI) in Jos, Plateau State, for analysis. The laboratory suspected the presence of avian influenza (AI), but was not equipped to identify which strain. The NVRI lab also detected the possible presence of other diseases, including cholera and the coronary respiratory disease. On 2 February, the sample was sent to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reference laboratory in Rome for further analysis. (Note: There is no laboratory in Nigeria capable of detecting the H5N1 strain of AI. End note.)

2. (SBU) The CVO office also sent a team to Zaria to investigate the deaths, and they traced some of the birds to Kano. The team then visited several farms in Kano, and found two poultry farms with high mortality rates as well. According the CVO, both the farm in Zaria and the two farms in Kano have fundamentally deficient animal health management practices which lead to serious health problems; the farms have no vets and no vaccination records, birds are sourced from multiple locations, and birds of different ages and from different flocks are commingled.

3. (SBU) In a later conversation with Ag Attache, the Nigerian CVO could not discount the possibility the bird deaths were due to H5N1. The CVO, who has apparently been in touch with FAO, told us the lab results should be ready tomorrow, 8 February. Mission will continue to monitor events closely.

BROWNE